

Message Text

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SUBJECT: ATHENS FESTIVAL: MERCE CUNNINGHAM DANCE COMPANY AND
THE WASHINGTON NATIONAL SYMPHONY

SUMMARY: THE MERCE CUNNINGHAM DANCE COMPANY AND WASHINGTON
NATIONAL SYMPHONY APPEARED BACK-TO-BACK IN ATHENS FESTIVAL
MAKING MAJOR CONTRIBUTION TO ATHENS CULTURAL SCENE AT MOMENT
WHEN SUCH CONTRIBUTION PROVIDED WELCOME SUPPORT OF OVERALL MISSION
EFFORTS TO ENHANCE GREEK-AMERICAN RELATIONS

1. MERCE CUNNINGHAM TROUPE GAVE FOUR PERFORMANCES WITHIN
FRAMEWORK OF ATHENS FESTIVAL AT HEROD ATTICUS AMPHITHEATER
ON AUGUST 17, 18, 19 AND 20. THE COMPANY ALSO AGREED TO A
USIS-SPONSORED OPEN REHEARSAL ON AUGUST 19 FOR TEACHERS
AND STUDENTS OF DANCE. FOLLOWING FINAL EVENING'S PERFORMANCE
AMBASSADOR AND MRS KUBISCH HOSTED CHAMPAGNE RECEPTION FOR
COMPANY AND OVER 100 ARTISTS AND INTELLECTUALS BACKSTAGE.
SEVENTY-FIVE SPECIALISTS IN DANCE ATTENDED OPEN REHEARSAL
INCLUDING DIRECTOR OF STATE SCHOOL OF DANCE AND MUSIC.
THE CUNNINGHAM DANCERS PERFORMED SPELDIDLY AND RECEIVED
PLAUDITS FROM CONNOISSEURS OF MODERN DANCE (E.G. THE MINISTER
OF SCIENCE AND CULTURE "THOROUGHLY ENJOYED" THE PERFORMANCE).
HOWEVER, THEIR AVANT-GARDE STYLE, THE CONCEPTUAL DIVORCE
BETWEEN THE CHOREOGRAPHY AND JOHN CAGE'S ELECTRONICS MUSIC,
AND THE MUSIC ITSELF LEFT MANY SPECTATORS IN A STATE OF
PUZZLEMENT. PRESS REACTION WAS EQUALLY MIXED, ALTHOUGH THE ATHENS
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FESTIVAL HOSTS WERE SATISFIED. THEY HAD SOUGHT TO EXPOSE GREEK

AUDIENCES TO WHAT HAS BECOME AN ACCEPTABLE EXPRESSION OF
CONTEMPORARY DANCE ELSEWHERE IN THE WORLD AND THEY SUCCEEDED

2. THE NATIONAL SYMPHONY'S APPEAL, ON THE OTHER HAND, WAS
RESOUNDING. THEY PERFORMED TO CAPACITY AUDIENCES WHO SHOWED
APPRECIATION AND ENTUSIASM ON OPENING NIGHT THROUGH
RHYTHMIC SYNCOPATED APPLAUSE, DEMANDING THE UNPARALLELED
NUMBER OF 3 ENCORES. ON EVE OF OPENING, AMBASSADOR AND
MRS KUBISCH HOSTED RECEPTION AT RESIDENCE FOR ORCHESTRA AT WHICH
MANY LEADING GOVERNMENT, POLITICAL, ARTISTIC, AND INTELLECTUAL
FIGURES APPEARED. SECOND EVENING'S CONCERT WAS TO HAVE
FEATURED WORLD RENOWNED PIANIST GINA BACHAUER PLAYING CONCERTO. HER
TRAGIC DEATH THAT SAME EVENING, WHICH BECAME KNOWN DURING THE
INTERMISSION, CAST A PALL ON CONCERT WHICH ENDED WITH FUNERAL
MARCH TRIBUTE. ON LAST EVENING, UNSEASONABLE DOWNPOUR CANCELLED
REMAINING HALF OF CONCERT, FIRST PART OF WHICH WAS ENTHUSIASTICALLY
RECEIVED IN OVATION FOR DORATI AND ORCHESTRA. ATTENDANCE
AT ALL CONCERTS WAS OPTIMAL, WITH SECOND EVENING PERFORMANCE
SOLD OUT. PRESENT AT OPENING AND SECOND NIGHTS WAS AN ARRAY
OF GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL LEADERS AS WELL AS THE ELITE FROM
THE ART WORLD. FORMER PRIME MINISTER PANAYOTIS KANELLOPOULOS INVITED
AMBASSADOR AND MRS KUBISCH TO SIT WITH THEM AND PRAISED THE
PERFORMANCE AFTERWARDS. MEDIA COVERAGE WAS EXTENSIVE. TV INTERVIEW
AND NEWS REPORTS WERE BROADCAST AND THE CONCERTS WERE BROADCAST
LIVE ON GREEK RADIO

3. HOWEVER, ONE DISAGREEABLE ASPECT WAS THE ORCHESTRA'S
FAILURE TO PLAY THE NATIONAL ANTHEMS OF GREECE AND THE
UNITED STATES AT ANY OF ITS PERFORMANCES, DESPITE THE
AMBASSADOR'S STRONG REQUEST AND ADVICE THAT IT DO SO.
THE AMBASSADOR PROTESTED THIS MOST REGRETTABLE OMISSION
TO THE ORCHESTRA'S MANAGEMENT AND REPRESENTATIVES ON SEVERAL
OCCASIONS -- ESPECIALLY SINCE IT HAD EARLIER BEEN AGREED THAT
THE ANTHEMS WOULD BE PLAYED - AND CONSIDERS THEIR EXPLANATIONS
TO BE UNSATISFACTORY. THIS POINT AND OTHERS WILL BE COVERED
MORE FULLY IN AN AIRGRAM TO FOLLOW.
KUBISCH

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